

RIVERS OF TYPE

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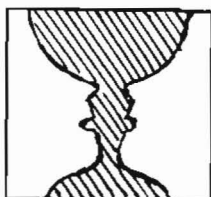
Niles, Michigan

What we have called rivers of type might be defined as those white portions between the printed words on a page of type which sometime form significant patterns. Discovering this phenomenon for the first time, I wondered why it had taken me so long, half my life in fact. I made a hobby of collecting rare examples, trying to find the longest river, the tallest vertical, the longest angle. They have a fugitive quality which adds zest to the search. My greatest moment was when I found a perfect circle. I raced to the Xerox machine, but in spite of a bookmark and a note of the page number, the circle had disappeared from my sight. I still open that book at odd moments hoping to catch that elusive circle unawares, but alas!

John McClellan, who is a master of words and word play, took an interest in the hobby and I asked him to write an introduction to it. He obliged me with the following analysis, explaining why rivers may be overlooked by even the most ardent reader, with some hints on how to become a connoisseur.

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Being trained from childhood to look for and evaluate the printed section of a page, it is understandable that we have difficulty in willfully ignoring the words themselves in favor of the empty white spaces. In like manner, the tenacity of childhood training is illustrated by the accompanying sketch of the goblet - or is it a drawing of two heads? It depends on whether the viewer selects the black or the white image as being the more important. People usually spot the goblet first and the faces second.



However, to return to our River, it is possible for these seemingly empty spaces to take on unexpected significance when we acquire the facility of finding meaningful patterns that may be hidden in the printed page. The excerpt on the next page will illustrate this. Try covering the right-hand one and seeing if you can find the rivers in the left, without the key.

If we stress 'meaningful' it is because the patterns of white

reflective. The Irish were invading these days. Fine old houses were the Irish, a few, were becoming acceptable, of course, though set at the periphery with their charities. Allan was enjoying himself. He realized. He avoided answering origins with the utmost deftness. reference, he did not improvise. in that. They spoke of music, matching words, for his vocabulary of his enormous reading. V

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are usually amorphous and incoherent; here, we use the term in the literal sense - 'full of meaning'. This meaning will, of course, vary with different individuals, for a pattern that has significance for one may not have it for another.

With some practice - usually of a pleasurable nature, like reading oneself to sleep at bedtime - one may begin to see interesting patterns emerging from the page; that 'end-of-the-day' drowsiness, when the bars of the wideawake, realistic world are beginning to grow flexible, is conducive to finding Rivers, and other whimsies the reader may like. (Because the first impression of those lines running through the pages was one of fluidity we have called them Rivers, but it must not be thought that those are the only patterns to appear.)

Sometimes by turning the page through a small angle, realism is diminished and the appearance of the abstract is facilitated. In much the same way landscape painters cut down an overabundance of realism by viewing their subject upside down - in fact, by almost standing on their heads! Colors and forms, thus emancipated from their usual frame of reference, stand out vividly on their own merits.

It is probably unnecessary to add that the duller the book the better the chance of finding Rivers; the more enthralling the contents, the less chance for our interest to dawdle off serendipitously into playful channels. But it is not for us to meddle in the reading habits of others. We shall be very glad to hear that some readers have tried this pleasant diversion with success. On the other hand, our feelings might be mixed if we received a letter reading, in part, "...I have just finished reading Paradise Lost, and guess what? On page 352 I found an almost perfect hangman's noose!"....

* * * * *

Following are a few examples on which you might want to try your skill before tackling your own reading matter. We have used the more obvious examples. We leave it to you to discover the fleeting shapes, the graceful landscapes, the elusive nudes. Here's another hint: squint your eyes a little when you see promising things. It helps to bring them out. Have fun!

It's hard to find a straight river of more than nine lines. My longest is eleven.

of King Amphitryon of Th
o brought you here told me
yon's son should tend cattl
I asked, the better off I v
over at him. The old goat
led as the fallen leaves up
o long that his body was b
id was sunk deep between
es were two black slits. Her
en his father's spearmen h
us was lying there, as he
ore the fire. The dogs cau
Aigipus started up, and ev
l at the strangers out of de
ng man that those eyes ha
gipus was still complaining
to what herdsman shoul
ill of a fever, had had to

A lazy river

or defamation of
cocker without wri
insisted that we ec
through a notary p
tions of this sort
recently occurred to
indeed, of plain co
straight out with th
to think up a name
idea that I am an e
come of a piece I w
ing the fact that I b
This is true, but it
my dogs were dispo
not gone to the tro
dents of my house
Cut That Out! and

A bend sinister

started off and we were soon
rough leafy lanes. I wanted
on and on forever. It was like
to an enchanted world. There
t mist in the air that made the
ery hazy, and this seemed to
tain kind of mystery to the

Two crescents on the same page!

"I never told you," said too. That is where we are g
Tony and Dolores star
could not meet the eryst:
smile at DeWitt instead, v
knew now with some bitt
thing. DeWitt was smirk
aloofly, "Daddy, you neve
a mother."

"You're such a ninny,"
elbow into his brother's ri
disgust. "Why shouldn't he
Dolores saw the color
and said quickly, "Maybe
"Oh, maybe he had," I
row glitter of his eyes je
got a reason, don't they, D

Tony regarded his bro
DeWitt." It was seldom t
self to rebuke anyone, bi
even from DeWitt. "And

A tear drop

ther, Stirling, that the rocking of the ship dic
re unduly."
ncied there was a glint of amusement in his
is a good sailor, eh?"
ould say she was."
ll, perhaps she'll settle in to our rough ways
ink she will?"
, I think so," said Stirling, smiling at me.
n she ride? She'll need to here."
ave ridden at home," I said, "so I daresay I c
turned his gaze on me then. "It's rough ridi
l, "in more ways than one. You'll notice a di
d a way of lifting one eyebrow which I far
to intimidate, but I felt a small triumph beca
him stop this slighting way of talking over me
addressed a remark to me.
hall have to adjust to it," I said.

A bend dexter

sweetly disturbed by the voic
cool breeze against the shutter
of the cow coming home to her
Tim entered the room, and
napkin, and a glass. He stood
regarded each other without sj
on a table and opened the bot
noisily into the glass, and Tin
not speaking, he extended the
and his fingers were so eager ti
it to his lips and drank it all, v
Tim watched him, his face hea
ing.